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NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

λιπαραὶ Ἀθᾶναι

Pind. Frag. 76 (46), from *Schol. Aristoph. Ach.* 674:

ὦ ταὶ λιπαραὶ καὶ ιοστέφανοι καὶ ἀσιδυμοι,
Ἐλλάδος ἔρεσμα, κλειναὶ Ἀθᾶναι,
δαιμόνιον πτολιέθρον.

Aristoph. *Ach.* 639 f.:

εἰ δέ τις ὑμᾶς ὑποθωπεύσας λιπαρὰς καλέσειν Ἀθῆνας,
εὑρέο πᾶν ἀν διὰ τὰς λιπαράς.

Why did the Athenians take such pride in this compliment? What did they understand Pindar to mean by *λιπαραὶ*? L.S. suggest “probably with allusion to the Attic olive,” and this explanation is the one usually given, though some scholars prefer to interpret *λιπαραὶ* as “rich.” The Schol. on Aristoph. *Nub.* 299 f., as usual in difficult cases, offers a variety of explanations, but sheds no real light on the problem.

The olive was indeed one of the glories of Athens, but we may well doubt a reference here to that famous gift of Athena. No parallel usage has been cited, and in a poet of the grand style, like Pindar, we should expect a direct *mention* of the olive, rather than an almost humorous reference to its oily gloss. “Sleek Athens” is scarcely a compliment in the Pindaric vein. Moreover, Pindar uses *λιπαρός* in praising a variety of other cities and localities, which were not specially celebrated for olives. So of Thebes, Marathon, Orchomenus, Naxos, Smyrna, and even Egypt—the latter a country where the existence of olive culture has frequently been denied, though probably on insufficient ground. Cf. Hehn-Schrader *Kultur-Pflanzen und Haustiere*, pp. 117, 120. In general, Pindar’s compliment, thus interpreted, would seem to be of too homely a character to account for the gratification it gave to the Athenians.

The case is even worse with the other accepted explanation, “rich.” The soil of Attica was notoriously light and poor. Cf. Thuc. i. 2. 5; Lolling *Hellenische Landeskunde* 114; Milchhöfer, in Pauly-Wissowa, *s. v.* “Attika.” And as for acquired wealth, the sorely devastated Athens of 475 B.C. (the approximate date of the dithyramb in which our passage occurred), could scarcely take pride in so ill-timed a compliment. The political and artistic glory of Athens, as well as her pre-eminence in literature, were still for the most part in the future. So, too, Pindar speaks (Frag. 204 [218]) of *λιπαρῷ Σμυρναῖων ἀστεῖ*, though Smyrna was in

ruins during the poet's lifetime. Cf. O. 13. 110: *λιπαρὰ Μαραθών*, of a country deme, renowned only on patriotic grounds.

In view of these facts we must admit that another explanation is needed for *λιπαραὶ Αθᾶναι*. The fact that a number of different localities are honored with the same epithet seems to point to a meaning of comparatively wide application, while the serious vicissitudes, through which Athens, Thebes, Orchomenus, and Smyrna had recently passed force us to search for a glory conferred by the enduring gift of Nature, rather than one created by the hands or brain of man. We must find, then, some natural feature of Athens, shared indeed with a wide circle of Mediterranean communities, but felt to be the special attribute of the violet-crowned city. And, finally, the feature for which we seek must be one which can readily be understood as implied in the epithet *λιπαρός*—“glossy,” “shining,” “brilliant.” We are thus driven irresistibly to the conclusion that our poet had in mind the clear and resplendent *atmosphere* of Attica. Brilliant skies are characteristic of most of the countries bordering upon the eastern Mediterranean, but especially and pre-eminently of Attica, as every traveler has noticed, and as many observers, both ancient and modern, have recorded. Cf. Cic. *De fato* 4. 7; Dion Chrys. *On Royalty* 6 *ad init.*; Aristides Rhetor. *Panath.* 161; Photius *Biblioth.* 441a. 28; Wachsmuth *Stadt Athen* 93 f.; Judeich *Topographie von Athen* 47.

This meaning of *λιπαρός*, “brilliant,” “resplendent,” suits all the passages in Pindar where the word is used, whether with names of localities, or in other locutions. Cf. Frag. 30 (6), where Themis is conducted Οὐλύμπου *λιπαρὰν καθ' ὁδόν*, to be the primal spouse of Zeus. In short, when Pindar wrote the words *λιπαρὰὶ Αθᾶναι*, he meant almost precisely what the Athenian Euripides meant, when he made his chorus (*Med.* 824 ff.) sing of the children of Erechtheus:

ἀεὶ διὰ λαμπροτάτου
βαίνοντες ἀβρῶς αἰθέρος.

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Στ. οὐκ ἔξελήλακ, ἀλλ' ἔγὼ τοῦτ' ϕόμην
διὰ τοντονὶ τὸν δῖνον. οἴμοι δεῖλαος
ὅτε καὶ σὲ χυτρεοῦν ὄντα θεὸν ἡγησάμην.

This passage has long defied the commentators. The difficulty is an old one as R and V have *διὰ* unaccented and a lesser Paris MS, *δία*, which approximates Bentley's subtle but unconvincing emendation, *τότ' ϕόμην | Δία*. This reading of Bentley's is, however, impossible, if for